



# News Release

**For immediate release:** July 17, 2012

(12-092)

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## **Rabies found in WA bats; recent incidents highlight the risk for rabies**

*Anyone having contact with a bat should be evaluated for risk of rabies*

**OLYMPIA** — Bats in Washington often test positive for rabies, and this year already, three people had to be treated for exposure to rabid bats. The Department of Health tests bats that have been caught after coming in contact with people. Every year, people in the state require medical treatment following contact with bats that test positive for rabies. Rabid bats have been found in almost every county in Washington.

Rabies virus is spread in the saliva of an infected animal, most commonly through a bite. There's a chance a person can catch the virus if infected saliva gets in the eyes, nose, or mouth, or gets in a scratch or wound in the skin.

Rabies is a fatal disease, but it can be prevented with prompt medical care following a bite or other exposure to rabies virus. Treatment is a series of shots given on a specific schedule over a 14-day period.

If you are bitten by a bat, or another animal, clean the wound with soap and water and get medical attention. Any direct contact with a bat should be carefully evaluated. Likewise, when a bat is found indoors the situation should be evaluated. This is particularly important if a person wakes up and finds a bat in a room where they or another person were sleeping. Bat teeth are very small and sharp and a wound from a bat bite may not be visible; a bat bite might not even be felt by a sleeping person.

Call your [local health agency](#) for help evaluating people or pets that may have been exposed to bats in the home. They can help arrange to test the bat for rabies, if needed. When an animal tests positive for rabies, people who were exposed to the animal must be vaccinated to protect them from the disease.

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Never touch a wild bat or any other wild animal. Healthy bats usually don't come near enough to be touched. A bat that is slow, lying on the ground, or that lands on a person could be showing signs of illness. If you can touch the animal, chances are it's sick.

Important bat safety tips:

- Teach children that if they find a bat they should not touch it, or any wild animals, and that they should always immediately go tell an adult.
- “[Bat proof](#)” your home by making sure open windows have screens and that other small entry points—such as cracks, crevices, or holes—are sealed.
- If a bat is in your home or cabin, wait until the bat lands on the floor or a wall. Wear leather or other thick gloves to capture the bat in a can or box without touching it. Close the container and call your local health agency.
- Pets are a potential source of rabies exposure. Make sure pets are vaccinated against rabies, as required by state law. Although it's rare for a pet to contract rabies, it can happen. The virus can be transmitted from bats to pets as well as other wild animals.
- If you're traveling to a country where rabies is common, talk to your health care provider about receiving rabies prevention treatment before you go.

The [Department of Health website](http://doh.wa.gov) (doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*.

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